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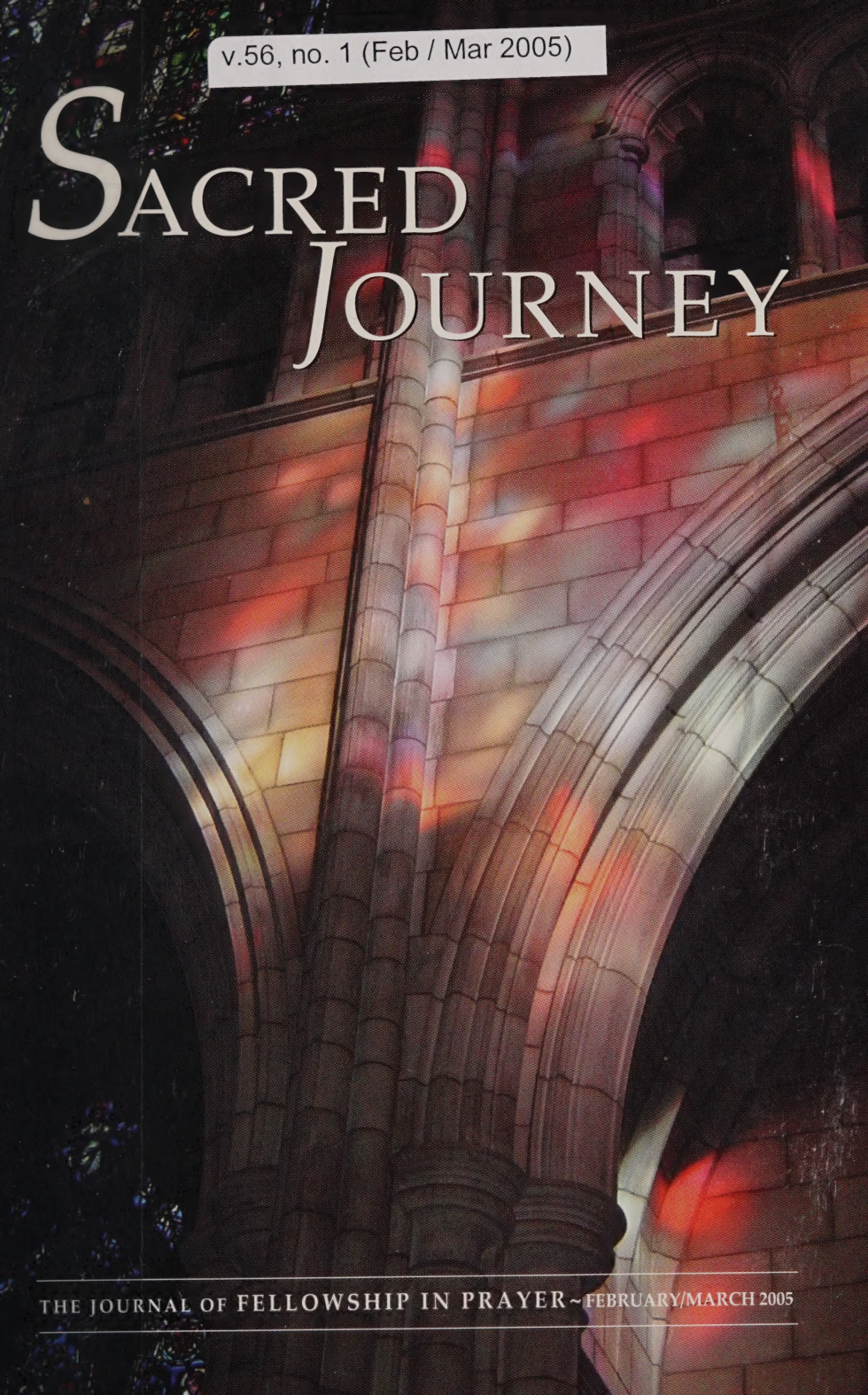
SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ FEBRUARY/MARCH 2005

SACRED JOURNEY®

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

to encourage and support

a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit of unity

among humankind.

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Archive Copy

Cover photo: Princeton University Chapel, by Louise Hutner

Our Call to Evolve

"Conflict is not just two people yelling, but can be defined as an experience created when two or more things disagree. Conflict is everywhere; water hitting rock, teachers pushing students to learn, or wolves trying to coexist with ranchers. It is our call to evolve. It challenges us to look beyond our current views to an expanded reality. It is a relentless teacher that asks us to see unity where before we found opposites."

~ Deidre Combs, *The Way of Conflict*

To live with an open mind and heart is an ongoing challenge for most of us. When we succeed, disagreement and conflict become less a threat than an interesting opportunity to learn from one another and to evolve.

Recently, we've received comments about our December 2004 issue, many favorable and a few of distress at finding an interview with Senator Bill Frist in our publication. Of the latter, each condemned Frist, the public figure, with articulate and well-informed commentary—and then chastised SACRED JOURNEY for publishing an interview with him.

I'm glad to hear from our readers because then I know that our material has aroused them to think and to challenge and often to stretch beyond their comfort zone.

The resulting discomfort can be the source of growth and constructive action if one is careful not to let negativity close the heart and mind.

I conducted the Frist interview because I was curious about what someone in his position has to say about the role of prayer and faith in his life. Ours is a non-partisan organization which does not take positions on individuals in politics. This interview is neither an endorsement nor an indictment. It is simply an exploration of the prayer life of a person of importance in our world.

Some readers saw an unsettling contrast between Frist's words and his actions, and between this interview and the rest of our December issue. That is one of the beauties of our publication—and of our democracy—which allows a wide range of voices to be heard. My hope is that the December issue has stimulated each reader to think, to question, to learn more, and to take constructive action towards peace in our world.

We must listen to all voices, no matter how much we disagree, so that we can know each other better. When we have heard the other then we can move forward with an informed spiritual consciousness. If we can keep an open mind and heart, and can resist the temptation to condemn and reject when we disagree, we have a much better chance of creating peace, and of living by the fundamentally similar moral principles at the heart of all our faith traditions.

I offer you these thoughts in love and peace and the hope of our mission at SACRED JOURNEY "to help bring about a deeper spirit of unity among humankind."

"While you are proclaiming peace with your lips, be careful to have it even more fully in your heart."

~ St. Francis of Assisi

OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS:

This month we're pleased to introduce you to five new board members at Fellowship in Prayer:

Dr. Thomas Breidenthal has been Dean of Religious Life and of the Chapel at Princeton University since January 2002. Before then he was Professor of Christian Ethics at The General Theological Seminary in New York City. An Episcopal priest, he received a D.Phil. in Theology from Oxford University. His work has focused on interfaith dialogue, political theology, and the role of faith in shaping personal relationships.

Dr. Ephraim Isaac is Director, Institute of Semitic Studies, Princeton, NJ, and Visiting Professor of Religion and African-American Studies at Princeton University. Born and raised in Ethiopia, Dr. Isaac holds a B.A. in philosophy, chemistry & music from Concordia College and an M.Div. from Harvard Divinity School. Dr. Isaac is a prolific scholar whose areas of research include Biblical Hebrew, Rabbinic Literature, Ethiopian History, Afroasiatic Languages, the Concept and History of Slavery, and Ancient African Civilizations. He knows 17 languages. He lectures on subjects including religion, literature, ancient history, and peace and conflict resolution.

Rebecca Laird served as the editor of SACRED JOURNEY from 1996 to 2003. She is currently Associate Pastor for Spiritual Development at Central Presbyterian Church of Summit, NJ. She is a graduate of Pacific School of Religion, and is a certified spiritual director. She spent many years in book publishing and is the editor and author of several books, including *The Heart of Henri Nouwen: His Words of*

Blessing which she co-edited with Michael Christensen. They are currently working on a companion volume on Nouwen's approach to spiritual guidance.

Dr. Albert Raboteau was born in Mississippi and grew up in Michigan and California. He has taught in the Religion Department at Princeton University since 1982, offering courses on American Religious History, Roman Catholicism in America, Religious Encounters in the Colonial Atlantic, African-American Religious History, and Religion and the Literature of Fantasy. He has written several books, including *Slave Religion, A Fire in the Bones, Canaan Land,* and *A Sorrowful Joy,* a spiritual memoir. Raboteau also serves as the lay coordinator of Mother of God Orthodox Mission in Plainsboro, NJ., and has participated in Fellowship in Prayer events.

Beverly Sanford is Director of Communications and Fellowships for the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, as well as Secretary of the Foundation. She has also served as associate director of a regional affairs institute at the University at Buffalo and as communications officer for the University's president. A published essayist, she holds degrees in literature from the Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Univ. at Buffalo. Her early spiritual training was Protestant; she now practices Tibetan Buddhism with the Shambhala Meditation Group in Princeton.

Ed. Correction: *For our Dec. 2004 issue we received incorrect information for Ruth Naylor's biography (pg. 27). She completed the Spiritual Guidance Program at the ecumenical Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation which does not certify spiritual directors but granted Rev. Naylor a certificate of completion of the program.*

OUR FEATURE
Brother Wayne Teasdale:
A Tribute and an Autobiographical Essay

In this issue we pay tribute to Brother Wayne Teasdale, a world-renowned spiritual teacher and scholar, a monk, mystic, and activist, who passed away on October 20, 2004, at the age of 59, after struggling with cancer. A Catholic lay monk, Brother Wayne took a vow to make interreligious dialogue his ministry. He was a passionate activist who worked throughout his life to create dialogue and mutual understanding among the world's religions. He was a leading voice in the Christian contemplative movement and he dedicated himself to helping people discover their true spiritual nature.

Brother Wayne was a good friend of ours here at Fellowship in Prayer, especially of our President Emeritus, Paul Walsh, who writes the following tribute. After that, we offer Teasdale's autobiographical essay from his recently published book, *Awakening the Spirit, Inspiring the Soul: 30 Stories of Interspiritual Discovery in the Community of Faiths.* Teasdale participated in our conferences, "Companions on the Sacred Journey," in 2000 and 2002, leading workshops on "The Mystic Heart" and "How to Live as a "Monk" in the World."

Union with the Divine

By Paul Walsh

Brother Wayne Teasdale, perhaps more than any man I have ever known, radiated loving kindness and an unshakeable faith in the goodness of God. We became friends at the Parliament of the World's Religions, in Chicago, in 1993. My wife and I had flown out to represent Fellowship in Prayer and to give a series of workshops, with Danny Martin, on prayer and meditation on an interfaith basis.

Our conviction was—is—that sharing spiritual experiences strengthens us all on our journey to ultimate reality, regardless of the particular path we take to get there. Wayne called that sharing across religious traditions "interspirituality" and he liked to illustrate what he meant by telling the Hindu story of the blind men and the elephant. Each tries to define the elephant by touching it and describing the part he has got hold of—the trunk, the tail, a tusk, an ear, and so on. Each thought his experience was the whole truth. None of them could comprehend what the whole elephant was like.

I remember especially Wayne telling me, another time, that the growth of an interspiritual wisdom required the shared spiritual practice of a community, and that the most rewarding form of spiritual practice is meditation. He was, later, to write in his numinous book, *The Mystic Heart,* that "Something profoundly real occurs when people meditate together—a silent communication in the midst of the personal intimacy of prayer. There is a depth to meditation experiences

among people of different traditions. Often practitioners achieve greater mutual understanding through a shared sitting than from endless hours of conversation, no matter how rich and meaningful. Important breakthroughs can occur, and these can carry into other areas of mutual discovery."

In November of 2000, Wayne was diagnosed with palate cancer. An agonizing process of surgery and radiation therapy followed. Thomas Keating helped him see his illness as a dark night of the soul, an inner purification preceding a permanent union with the Divine. As Wayne writes in his last book, *A Monk in the World,* "This dark night of the soul has concentrated my attention on what is really necessary. I began letting go of everything, since everything seemed so meaningless in relation to the goal: union with God." In October of 2004, Wayne left this world and achieved that goal.

Perhaps his good friend, Joan Borysenko, summed up his life best when she wrote: "Once in a rare while you encounter a soul on fire with divine love, committed to living a life of contemplation and service beyond the walls of the monastery. For Wayne Teasdale, the world itself was a monastery. "

A Christian Contemplative In An Interspiritual World

Brother Wayne Teasdale

All of us are on a spiritual journey of one sort or another. My path has been a progressively intermystical one as a Christian monk in a uniquely contemporary situation: an interfaith context of exploration, or what I have come to name interspirituality. In what follows I want to trace my development from my Roman Catholic roots to a Christian mystic open to the wisdom and spiritual treasures of my brothers and sisters in the other faith traditions, or who follow a different form of spirituality than mine. . .

I was a pious little kid from West Hartford, Connecticut (well, pious most of the time). Catholicism was my culture, my faith, my very world. The other faiths were very remote from my experience and understanding. My anchor was Rome, especially in the pope; my hero was St. Francis of Assisi, whom I knew as a dear friend. As a child and teenager, and on into adulthood, I really must say that I knew Francis as if we had grown up together, and in a sense we did. I had read more than twenty books on the saint and on St. Clare as well, not to mention Augustine, Benedict, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, the Blessed Mother, and countless others.

When I was a child, nature was so magical to me, and all of life. The Divine surrounded me in the natural world with its endless wonders, in the cosmos with its countless stars and galaxies, and in the mysteries of human life. . . The notion of the magical is how children

process the mystical. This is one reason why Harry Potter is so popular with our children. When I was a child, everything to me was magical—that is, mystical.

In 1996 when I went on to St. Anselm College in New Hampshire, an extraordinary school operated by Benedictine monks, I was going through a very painful agnostic period, brought on by a confrontation with an understandably bitter Vietnam vet who was a hard-nosed atheist. It adversely affected my childlike Catholic faith. I never rejected my Catholicism but suffered through the emptiness of skepticism. I majored in philosophy to be able to confront atheism with its unquestioned assumptions, but I only discovered a more solid ground of truth when I began to have mystical experiences, which awakened me experientially to the divine reality. I have had hundreds of these experiences over the years, and they have granted me a certitude that eluded me earlier.

Of course I went on to graduate school, doing an MA in philosophy and a PhD in theology. During graduate school, Thomas Keating, a saintly Trappist spiritual master, actually my spiritual father, sent me to an East/West monastic conference to—as he put it at the time—"baptize" me into interreligious dialogue and the whole interfaith phenomenon. It was June 1977, and prior to that I had started a correspondence with Bede Griffiths, an English Benedictine monk and spiritual writer in South India. Both Thomas Keating and Bede Griffiths have been enormously influential in my opening to other religions, particularly the Hindu traditions of the subcontinent.

I started going to India for long periods in 1986, and after my third visit in 1988, Bede invited me to accept

initiation into *sannyasa*. After sufficient spiritual preparation, I took *sannyasa* from Father Bede on January 5, 1989. This commitment had introduced me into an Indian lineage of monastic life and contemplation, which I take very seriously. *Sannyasa*, a medieval Sanskrit word, nevertheless names a monastic form that is at least seven thousand years old and is the origin of Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist monasticism. There have been Christian *sannyasis* since the mid-seventeenth century, with the Jesuit priest Roberto de Nobili as the first pioneer. This is my stream of monastic tradition, combined with the Benedictine tradition of the Catholic Church in which I was previously formed, though I had never taken vows in this tradition. Whereas Thomas Keating had taught me all the principles and practices of the spiritual life, including the contemplative attitude and meditation in its form known as Centering Prayer, Bede Griffiths had schooled me in the prophetic function of speaking truth to power, and regarding the leadership of the church with a critical eye but not with any kind of hostility. I realized long ago that I have a great love for the church, but that does not mean I am silent in the face of injustice and the need for reform.

Another significant influence on my life and development, especially in relation to appreciating the other religions and the importance of the interfaith movement, is His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who has deeply inspired my life. His warmth, sanctity, wisdom, and joy have had a great impact on my life and understanding. His authenticity is so intriguing to me, and I realize that in his example, Christians have a lot to learn from Buddhists, and vice versa, which is something His Holiness has often observed. His friendship is a great gift in my life.

My encounter with Buddhism, the inner processing of it, has led me into a sort of Buddhist dark night of the soul. I was caught up in its beauty, truth, and goodness and struggled to relate it to the inner beauty, truth, goodness, and mystical coherence of the Christian tradition and all my contemplative experience as a lay monk in it. . . For me, at this point in my spiritual journey, I was trying to reconcile the utter authenticity of my experience and certitude of the Divine Reality, God, the Absolute, or Source, with the Buddhist silence on God. . .

Much of this Buddhist dark night of the soul I endured was a kind of shaking of my Christian foundations and a venturing out from the safe shores of the church into the mysterious, and to me hitherto unexplored, lands of the Buddha. The examples of countless Tibetans . . . have reinforced in my understanding the utter and precious value of Buddhist spirituality as profoundly authentic.

I do feel that there is something missing for me in Buddhism, and that is its apparent lack of a tradition of seeking an ultimate source. . . In the long run, this issue of theism or nontheism will be resolved through dialogue and research. It could well be more of a linguistic or semantic question we must deal with in order to find a common ground between these two approaches.

Regardless of this and related issues, Christian and Buddhist contemplatives, along with their counterparts in Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, Taoism, Islam, and other religious traditions; the indigenous spiritualities, including shamanism; and the enlightened ethical humanists in the scientific community, have a common ground in the mystical quest, the moral awareness, and the urgency of collaborating together on the critical issues. The most pressing and distressing of these are

religiously based violence, warmongering, and ecological blindness of so many factions—individuals who simply haven't awakened to the crisis our planet is in, and the deep disparities of wealth, educational, and employment opportunities, resources, and technology. The greatest work of our time is to be peacemakers, the sine qua non for stability, economic well-being for all, and the possibility of solving the environmental nightmare we are in.

. . . I have arrived at the realization that the mystical realization, from which all the traditions of spiritual wisdom have arisen, can function as the "missing link" or bridge between the religions, as the heart of the dialogue of the world's religions. That dialogue is crucial in forging ahead in the interfaith arena.

. . .

I believe that there is a universal mystical experience, and a spirituality deriving from it, a global or planetary spirituality, but it is neither intentional nor systematic. No group got together at the dawn of human consciousness and said: "Let us create an overarching mystical wisdom and practice." Rather, interspirituality—the exploration of this common ground—is the discovery that the mystical is a universal dimension of humanity's inner life and experience. All of the contents of this dimension . . . are part of this intermystical thread of humankind's common source of spirituality. In the end, all of it will be known to reveal the Source as originating point of an ongoing revelation.

Thus, I find myself a Christian mystic in an increasingly interspiritual world threatened by the dangerous refusal by fundamentalist extremism to acknowledge the authenticity and value of other belief

systems. Up the road of history this extremism will dissipate, but not through violent reactions to it. Through patient dialogue and the careful building of consensus, a way forward will emerge. Such dialogue and consensus building is the practical side of interreligious work. This work has as its long-term task the envisioning and development of a new global polity: a civilization of love; a new universal society with a heart, once conceived in wisdom; compassion; an ethics of kindness; and the full awakening of all humanity, as well as other sentient beings, to their ultimate potential for spiritual maturity.

I would like to close this piece with what I call the Intention Practice, an exercise I find very beneficial in locating and maintaining perspective. Here is how it goes:

Close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths. Allow yourself to relax, for it is in relaxing that the greatest breakthroughs occur. Now rest for a few minutes in the pervading stillness and silence. Be absorbed in it. Then identify what it is you truly belive that you most want. What is the deepest, purest intention of your heart, your very being? Ask yourself: does this intention unite me with the Source? Does it benefit all beings? If it does, be devoutly grateful. If it does not, ask that your intention be enlightened, your heart expanded, your understanding widened, and your will strengthened.

Excerpt is from Awakening the Spirit, Inspiring the Soul: 30 Stories of Interspiritual Discovery in the Community of Faiths, © *2004 by Wayne Teasdale and Martha Howard. Permission granted by SkyLight Paths Publishing, P.O. Box 237, Woodstock, VT 05091,* www.skylightpaths.com.

"Many Paths to Heaven" by Louise Hutner

ILLUMINATIONS

We come from Love; we are sustained in Love, and to Love we shall return.

~ *Christian saying*

Be a blazing fire of truth, be a beauteous blossom of love, and be a soothing balm of peace.

~ *Sufi saying*

May the Lord increase and make abundant the love you have for one another, and towards all persons . . . to the end that God may establish your hearts blameless in holiness.

~ *1 Thessalonians 3:11-13*

Compassion is the keen awareness of the interdependence of all things.

~ *Thomas Merton*

To love always and love all. To be able to say at the end of each day: "I loved in every moment."

~ *Chiara Lubich, Focolare Movement (love in action)*

Love and mercy apply to everybody, no matter how much we want to hate them.

~ *Bo Lozoff, Human Kindness Foundation*

I am an optimist. It does not seem too much use being anything else.

~ *Winston Churchill*

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The soul that walks in love neither rests nor grows tired.
~ *St. John of the Cross*

To love is to think, speak, and act according to the spiritual knowledge that we are infinitely loved by God and called to make that love visible in the world.
~ *Henri Nouwen*

When you begin to touch your heart or let your heart be touched, you begin to discover that it is bottomless, that it doesn't have any resolution, that this heart is huge, vast and limitless. You begin to discover how much warmth and gentleness is there, as well as how much space.
~ *Pema Chodron*

If we knew how to adore, then nothing could truly disturb our peace. We would travel through the world with the tranquility of the great rivers.
~ *St. Francis of Assisi*

If anybody asks what Sufism is, what kind of religion it is, the answer is that Sufism is the religion of the heart, the religion in which the thing of primary importance is to seek God in the heart of humankind.
~ *Hazrat Inayat Khan*

The highest wisdom is kindness.
~ *Berakot, 17A, Jewish tradition*

Our Illuminations are from Wayne Teasdale's book The Mystic Hours: A Daybook of Interspiritual Wisdom & Devotion, *which has 365 quotes from the world's great religious and spiritual traditions, followed by Teasdale's illuminating commentary.*

My Heart is My Temple

Meath Conlan

Early winter mists floated over the plains and valleys of this beautiful part of South India. Land that was donated by Nehru to the Tibetan refugees after 1959 has become a fertile estate for thousands. From afar the new gompa, a meditation hall as high as a five-storied building, looked imposing and surreal as it towered above everything else for miles around. Multi-coloured prayer flags flapped as columns of incense rose lazily into the blue and pinkish morning light, so typical of the sub-continent.

Sleepy, well-swept, dampened white-walled streets and alleyways of the large monastic village quietly turned maroon as thousands of Tibetan monks in traditional robes walked to their newly constructed hall. Today was the culmination of years of effort by their retired abbot Khensur Rinpoche and many other lamas who travelled the world as lama dancers, butter sculptors, and mandala creators, and above all as goodwill ambassadors of this tiny Buddhist sect that is gaining more and more attention from not only Western but also considerable numbers of Asian people who have become dubious of the materialist cultures in which they live.

This morning and for the rest of the week His Holiness

Meath Conlan is an Australian researcher and author, and a member of the Bede Griffiths Trust. In December 2003 he went on an interfaith pilgrimage to the inauguration of the meditation hall at Seramey Monastic University in South India. This article is courtesy of Meath Conlan and The Tablet, *Jan. 7, 2003, at* http://www.bedegriffiths.com.

the XIVth Dalai Lama would be presiding at inauguration ceremonies, and thereafter delivering teachings on significant though rarely commented upon Tibetan scriptures for a gruelling six hours a day. Each session commenced with 8,500 monks from as far away as Tibet and Mongolia. They intoned the deep-throated three-toned chanting now familiar as essential to Tibetan ceremonial. Countless steward monks quietly and efficiently served breakfast of hot butter tea and warm rice to everyone, including the small contingent of foreigners who were, like me, fortunate enough to attend as guests of the monastery.

From the moment I arrived at the monastery I was caught by the atmosphere of reverence and respect shown by each monk toward every other monk. Without pushing or shoving, younger monks would reverently take the hand of older monks and either step back, allowing them to move forward, or would gently guide them to a seat at the front of the crowd. Monks of equal age would bow to each other in an attitude of surrendering their place in the queue, or of even giving up their viewing advantage so that another might benefit. Even we 'outsiders' were shown such deference, to which we had no right, that it made one wince.

In the skies above the gompa thousands of eagles floated on air currents, waiting for the ceremonial rice and other food offerings to be placed atop the many monastery buildings. They also had a part in today's proceedings—much as they do every day after morning and afternoon rituals that always seem to involve food offerings, either to the deities or to human beings attending and taking part.

Such witness to respectful and gentle mindfulness of the needs of one's companions is as striking and edifying as is the whole community's regard for nature's needs in the animals and birds that abound within and

around the monastery. Nothing seems to be too much trouble in the way members of the community relate to one another. Individuals are committed to showing this traditional respect as their way of spreading the Dharma—the Universal Law—as taught by Guatama Buddha, and they show it, as an offering for the benefit of these and all beings, without discrimination.

The Dalai Lama's words are printed and displayed all over the monastic village: "We have no need for great temples or complicated philosophies: our heart is our temple, and our kindness is our philosophy."

I've been associated with interfaith dialogue for nearly twenty years. From the first occasion, which was to lecture Tibetan Buddhists on the history, development, and practice of the Christian Contemplative tradition, I've never seen any shift in the stance of gentleness, reverence, and respect in the Tibetan attitude to all other beings. This is also extended to those who have in the past mistreated them, their culture and traditions, and may wish to continue doing so in the present. Archbishop Fitzgerald stressed that one of the aims of interreligious dialogue is, "to take a step forward and help people of various religions to cooperate together, that is, to cooperate to help humanity, to address the problems of our world together." My friend and host, Khejok Rinpoche, a high lama who now lives and teaches in Australia, writes, "When you face a hostile person, think about this: he is simply having a hard time trying to find happiness and avoid suffering. It just so happens that when he was going about doing so, you got in the way. See yourself in him and your anger will melt away." There is so much we can, if we are open, learn from other religious traditions.

At the end of the first day of instructive teaching from

His Holiness, and the amazing witness provided by so many thousands of monastics patiently sitting cross-legged in reverential silence at his words, I left with all the rest. But it was not to rush off to do some other task, or to be somewhere else, or even to be taken up making plans for some future event that may have occupied my mind. It was simply to exercise the same gentle and respectful attitude of mind to myself that I had been offered by the Dalai Lama and his community that day—the reverential realisation that I was and am valuable and quite okay just as I am. The Dalai Lama constantly repeats that his religion is kindness. It is my quiet resolve that today I'll start again to treat myself with kindness, with gentle reverence that may, in its own way, spread to others with whom I live and work and play.

With this inner affirmation I walked with my companions back to the cottage provided by that once-refugee monk Khejok Rinpoche. I realized, once more, that much of what passed for self-righteous judgment of others—within me and within whole communities in our world today—is based on fear and ignorance. I reminded myself that the Dalai Lama and his Tibetan community in exile offer me and the suffering world a reminder of the need to acquire, or rediscover, the quiet art of gentle, kindly self-acceptance. To accept this offering means showing compassion towards others as though to one's self. It means granting tolerance and understanding for all in the many "tense and conflicting situations" people find themselves in today. Only in this way, by in fact realizing that, as my friend Khejok Rinpoche said, 'the other' is myself, will my anger melt away, and I'll be able to do my part in overcoming the afflictive emotions that have brought us all to such a dangerous and fearful place in world history.

"Labyrinth in Snow" by Will Flemer; Photo by Louise Hutner

First Light

This is the light I crave
the first light
the new creation light
that falls softly
on all it touches
the light that does not invade
but leaves some spaces
in shadow
waiting their own time to be seen

This is the light I crave
the first light
the waking light
the renewing light
the touch of creative love
that warms but does not blister
this is the light I crave

wilma gayle waddell

Wilma Gayle Waddell is a counselor, a poet, and is currently a student in the Spiritual Formation Certification Program at Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia. She and her husband live in Somerset, Kentucky with a cat named Harmony.

Soul Wisdom

Soul Wisdom whispers
and
Truth echoes through hollows
of
memory and mind
Soul Wisdom sighs
and
Love flows through crevices
of
spirit and self
while
Divinity Smiles

Mary Jo Grant

Mary Jo Grant has a Ph.D. in archetypal psychology and practices psychospiritual counseling. She is married to an attorney and is the mother of two and the grandmother of four grandsons.

A Walk Through The Valley

Eileen Medeiros

I am going to find God today, I declare to myself. I've been desperately trying to find God lately—to connect with Him, to be aware of His presence. All the things I've typically done aren't working anymore. The spiritual discipline of meditating on Scripture no longer works. My mind wanders and before I know it, I'm planning dinner for next Wednesday. I can't find God in church anymore although everyone else seems convinced He's there. When I attend church now, I feel physically ill—claustrophobic almost. I find the hymns, once uplifting, now oppressive, the sermons simplistic and formulaic. Small-group Bible studies bore me.

Everything I've been taught to do no longer works. In fact, it all seems to drive me *further* from God. I'm growing frustrated, even angry.

This particular morning, I decide to try to find God in nature. A friend of mine recently loaned me a book that explains various ways people connect with God: nature, the arts, intellectual pursuits, hospitality. I suspect I might be a nature person so I decide to take a

After ten years in campus ministry, Eileen Medeiros returned to school in 2002 for a doctorate in English. She also teaches writing and public speaking. She lives in Providence, Rhode Island with her husband, four-year-old son, and a dog, cat, goldfish, and two fire-belly toads.

long, meandering walk through the park that borders my neighborhood. The authors of the book suggest meditating on something. I choose Psalm 23.

Though the temperature isn't that cold for a winter morning, it's raw. Damp weather has a way of seeping into my bones and chilling me for hours. To prevent this, I bundle up: long underwear, leggings, turtleneck, jeans, sweater; and two pairs of socks. I don't want to be cold as I try to find God. I feel heavy and bloated as I bend down to tie the laces of my boots. By the time I zip my jacket, secure my red flannel hat, and put on my gloves, I'm sweating.

Once in the park, I give myself marching orders: *Okay, let's begin.* I'm turning this into somewhat of a military exercise, but to concentrate and *really* connect with God I've got to be serious. *Psalm 23: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.* I walk past a statue of a Greek god. *Mrs. Smith's English class freshman year . . . Edith Hamilton's* Mythology . . . I realize that I'm not concentrating on the task at hand: to connect with God. I resume: *He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters . . . What should I do about Patricia? Should I call her when I get home? Did Bob take the paperwork into work? If I make pasta tonight, will I have leftovers for tomorrow?* I realize again that I've been ignoring nature and meditating instead on my to-do list. I catch myself. *Okay, let's try this again.* I mouth quickly and silently:

Psalm twenty three The Lord is my shepherd I shall not be in want He makes me lie down in green pastures He leads me beside quiet waters. . . ahh. . . there I am. . . He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. . . good grief. . . I didn't get very far. . . I should call my mother this morning to

see how she's doing. I need to plan the final staff meeting for next week. Maybe I should take the team out to lunch.

I'm pulled once again into the vortex of my to-do list. My meandering walk to find God through nature now *truly* needs to become a military exercise. I start marching through the park. *I will do this, come hell or high water, I will do this. I will connect with God this morning.* I begin again. Not surprisingly, five minutes later I'm thinking for the fourth time about what I need to do today. I give up. *Sorry God. I tried, but I can't seem to do it. This isn't working, so I might as well get on with my day.*

I continue to walk, feeling like a failure. I decide to take a shorter route home and my shortcut brings me past the park's greenhouses. I've lived nearby for three years and I've never been into them. I notice they're open and decide to go in.

As I open the door, I'm met with an earthy warmth and I quickly pull the door shut behind me. Immediately, I'm sweating. I unzip my coat and pull off my hat and gloves. In the midst of the raw winter morning, I've walked into a Japanese garden with a still pool of water, dotted with lily pads. Fat goldfish float lazily among the pads. A giant bonsai tree sits at the end.

Then comes Africa where I see a tall, sickly coffee tree. A bird of paradise plant sits elegantly nearby, its bright orange flower a shock in the midst of the green surroundings.

Next I find the Tropics. The plants are lush and I'm reminded of Crayola colors: spring green, electric lime, magic mint, fern. The air is especially damp and warm here. By now my coat is off.

At the end of the building lies the desert. I see a crown of thorns and I'm surprised at how pretty it is. I didn't

know that this was a plant. I think of Jesus. *Is this what his crown of thorns was made of? Green leaves and bright pink flowers that hide the sharp thorns underneath them? Or did he wear the crown that looks like barbed wire that I see on the crucifixes?* I'm taken aback by my own thoughts. Somehow the green crown doesn't seem to fit the occasion of his death. It seems almost a sacrilege.

I cross the small breezeway and enter the second greenhouse. I've walked into England. A formal garden sits primly in front of me. A pool of water gurgles peacefully. Little hedges carved into the shapes of rabbits and birds perch next to camellia bushes. Ivy runs wild, and pansies stare up at me.

After half an hour of wandering, I decide to get on with my journey home. This has been pleasant, but it isn't what I set out to do and I shouldn't waste any more time. I return past England, past the desert, past Africa and the Tropics, to Japan where I started. I re-bundle myself and, as I open the door, from the corner of my eye I notice something moving. I look down to see a tiny bird thrashing in the mulch. *A sparrow or chickadee?* As I look more closely, I realize that its wing looks funny—it's bent backwards.

I hover over the bird, cooing, *It's okay, little birdie. I'm not going to hurt you. It's okay.* I know I can't leave the poor thing here, but I have no idea where to get help. As I'm wondering what to do, the bird stops thrashing and lies motionless. I take off my gloves, reach down, and pick it up gently. It stirs ever so slightly in my hands and then stops. It takes me a moment to realize it's dead. *Its heart has stopped beating. It is no longer living. What was just alive is now dead.*

I'm scared and I start to cry. That might seem a

rather extreme reaction; it's just a bird after all. But it seems as if my life has been full of death recently. In less than two years, five people have died and left my life: my grandmother, an acquaintance, a neighbor, an aunt, a friend. I've never been afraid of death, yet now, with this bird, I'm scared of it.

Suddenly my fear turns into fury. *What the heck am I going to do with this thing? I can't leave it here and there's no one around to give it to. What should I do?* I'm furious that this has happened to me, furious that, while trying to connect with God, this darn little bird died on me. I decide to bury it right there. I brush away the mulch and dig a small hole in the dirt. Delicately I lay the bird in the hole and cover it. Tears stream down my face.

I stand up and stagger out of the greenhouse, my fear returning. *What just happened? Sacred. Sacred. Sacred.* I hear the word *sacred* over and over as I walk home. I love words. I'm a word person. I love to know the origins of words and understand the nuances of meaning. I know exactly where my *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* and *American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* sit on my bookshelf. I consult them immediately upon arriving home.

There are several definitions of sacred and this is the one I like: *worthy of religious veneration, HOLY; entitled to reverence and respect.* I hear the words of Psalm 23 in my head, right where I left off: *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.* I'm startled. In my fear, I encountered the sacred. *Sacred. Scared.*

I realize that I have found God today, but not as I imagined I would. I have seen green pastures. I have been led by still waters. I have walked through the valley of the shadow of death. And God has been with me.

"A Winter Walk" by Louise Hutner

Reflection

I throw open the cloister
of my own being
and await, in utter stillness,
mysterious stirrings of your presence.

I sense your nearness
as sweet as the fragrance
of Spring's garden.

I remember your movement
through the days of my life
like genial sunlight that
warms and brightens Winter's days.

I long for your power
to possess and shape me
so that if only for a brief moment
I might mirror your Being.

by Sandra Bounds

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Praise

I lean into the primordial void
of my own being,
peer into its shapeless shadows.

I open its reticent reaches
to the power of your presence.

I allow your spirit
to stir and shape my soul.

My heart lifts in voiceless praise
as you unveil your own Being.

by Sandra Bounds

Soul Felt

My prayers
like incense ascending
my intentions
like snowflakes falling —
sometimes the two meet.

by John Constantine Mastor

DAILY ACTS of Prayer

Kim Boykin

Several years ago, I ran across a mnemonic device for four basic types of prayer: the acronym ACTS. I've since discovered that many Christians are familiar with this formula, though no one has been able to tell me its origin. The A in ACTS is for adoration. The C is for contrition or confession. The T is for thanksgiving. And the S is for supplication—which is more commonly known as petition, but PACT doesn't have the same, nice, biblical ring as ACTS.

I first encountered this acronym in a book on prayer, in which the author observes that in the prayers of adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication, we are saying to God, "I love you," "I'm sorry," "Thank you," and "Please"—just the kinds of things a well-raised child is taught to say. I was disappointed that the author did not go on to discuss some of the less polite forms of prayer—the prayer of anger, for instance, or the prayer of yearning for a God who seems distant or whose very existence seems questionable.

Theologian Karl Rahner says that "in prayer we open our hearts to God." When I open my heart to God, I find a lot there besides "I love you," "I'm sorry," "Thank

Kim Boykin is the author of Zen for Christians: A Beginner's Guide *(Jossey-Bass, 2003). She is a doctoral student in religion at Emory University and leads workshops on meditation and prayer. She and her husband are residents of Green Bough House of Prayer, an ecumenical Christian retreat center in Scott, Georgia.*

you," and "Please." While there may be some value to politeness in our relationship with God, it seems to me that openness and honesty are even more important, and honesty is not always polite. In the Bible, especially in the Psalms, we can find examples of many forms of prayer, including the not-so-polite forms.

I decided I'd try to come up with a new acronym, one that included a wider range of forms of prayer. I was aiming for something like CORINTHIANS but seemed to be headed toward PTERODACTYL, so I was pleased when I finally came up with DAILY ACTS.

While one could add endlessly to a list of prayer forms, with a different form for every human emotion and need and way of relating to God, the acronym DAILY ACTS includes what I think are some of the most important forms of prayer.

ACTS still stands for adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication—praising God, apologizing to God, thanking God, and petitioning God.

The D in DAILY is for discernment. This is actually another polite form of prayer. In the prayer of discernment, we say to God, "What should I do?" We ask for God's help in discerning how to act, which alternative to choose, how best to do God's will in the world. For example, Solomon asks God for "an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil," and God, pleased with Solomon's request, gives him "a wise and discerning mind" (I Kings 3:9-12). And Psalm 143 says, "Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul."

The A in DAILY is for anger. In the prayer of anger, we say to God, "I hate this!" or "This doesn't seem fair!" or "What's wrong with You?!" This is not a very polite

form of prayer, but there is plenty of precedent for angry prayer. Job complains to God repeatedly about the apparently unfair treatment he is suffering from God, and in Psalm 44, the Psalmist complains that while the people have continued to uphold their covenant with God, God doesn't seem to have done the same:

Yet you have rejected us and abased us,
and have not gone out with our armies.
You made us turn back from the foe,
and our enemies have gotten spoil.

So the Psalmist calls on God to act as it seems God ought to act:

Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord?
Awake, do not cast us off forever!
Why do you hide your face?
Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?
For we sink down to the dust;
our bodies cling to the ground.
Rise up, come to our help.
Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love.

Any deep, honest, committed relationship includes anger. In *God and You,* William Barry says that "one of the strongest blocks to a more personal relationship with God is a repressed or suppressed anger and resentment at some of the unfairness life deals us." Even if we have some way of convincing ourselves that God is not to blame for the hurts of life, we still hurt, and we may direct our anger at the Creator of life. If this anger is unexpressed, Barry says, it will become "a massive wall between us and God."

The I in DAILY is for imprecation—saying to God,

"Smite my enemies!" Psalm 58 includes some imprecations against the "wicked":

O God, break the teeth in their mouths;
tear out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord!
Let them vanish like water that runs away;
like grass let them be trodden down and wither.
Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime,
like the untimely birth that never sees the sun.

Again, this is not a very polite form of prayer, but if prayer is opening our hearts to God, let's face it—this kind of thing is sometimes in our hearts.

The L in DAILY is for lamentation, the prayer of sorrow and grieving. There are many prayers of lamentation in the Psalms, for instance, in Psalm 6:

I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.
My eyes waste away because of grief;
they grow weak because of all my foes.

We can cry with God, grieve with God, tell God about our sorrows.

And the Y in DAILY is for yearning, saying to God, "Where are You?"—expressing our hunger for God, our longing for God, as in Psalm 42:

As a deer yearns for running streams,
so I yearn for you, my God.
I thirst for God, the living God.
When shall I go to see the face of God?

We can pray even when God seems absent, distant, or frustratingly silent. We can pray even when we're not

at all sure that we believe in God. We can pray about our yearning for the God to whom we address our words of prayer.

The acronym DAILY ACTS, you may notice, only includes verbal, discursive forms of prayer. I had wanted to include an S for silence or a C for contemplation in my new acronym, but I couldn't quite get it in there. But maybe there is actually a reminder of silent, contemplative prayer in DAILY ACTS: the blank space between the two words?

Some of our daily acts of prayer may express our love for God, our gratitude to God, and other nice things like that, and some of our daily acts of prayer may express our anger, our grief, or our wish for our enemies to be like snails that dissolve into slime. All of this is part of opening our hearts to God.

"Falls of Lana" by Matt McInerney

Divine Vibrations

Lynne McKinnon

The word mantra entered my vocabulary in the mid-seventies when I was 10 years old. My mother was "into" Transcendental Meditation and every afternoon around 5:00 she would disappear into the living room and silently repeat her mantra, leading her into a meditative state. It looked a lot like sleeping to me. As far as I was concerned, Mom was dozing off somewhere and otherwise inaccessible to me while I had urgent needs—like dinner. My mother would not tell me her mantra, no matter how many times I asked. As I look now at my own life and the role that sacred sound plays in it, I have a whole new appreciation for mantra practice and for what my Mom was trying to do way back then.

Although my mother dabbled briefly in eastern spirituality, I was raised in a conservative Catholic household. I explored various Christian traditions after college and was interested in religious studies; however, it was only when I started to practice Integral Yoga, a form of Hatha Yoga, that I truly began to blossom

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spiritually. The more I learned about yoga and its underlying principles, the more I came to experience a deep resonance with these ancient teachings.

Integral Yoga was introduced to the West by yoga master and beloved spiritual teacher Sri Swami Satchidananda in 1966. He is recognized throughout the world for his efforts to promote peace and interfaith understanding, serving on advisory boards for many organizations, including the Interfaith Center of New York, the Center for International Dialogue, and the Temple of Understanding. At the Satchidananda Ashram in Virginia he built the Light of Truth Universal Shrine (LOTUS), honoring all the world's major religions equally. This unique interfaith shrine, shaped like a giant lotus flower, honors the Spirit that unites all the different religions. Inside the shrine, a wide beam of light rises from the center of a lotus flower to the domed ceiling and joins together the lights emanating from each of the religions represented around the room.

Swami Satchidananda taught that we are here for the service of God and His creation, regardless to which religion we may belong. Dedicated to the principle that "Truth is One, Paths are Many," Swami Satchidananda's teachings bring together people of all backgrounds and beliefs so they can learn to respect the different paths of Self-Realization. It was in this experience with Integral Yoga that I found my guru and my spiritual home. Although yoga is not a religion, it is certainly a spiritual practice through which one may come to understand one's own Essential Nature or True Self.

The chanting and use of mantra found in Integral Yoga, in particular, was a way for me to experience the effects of repeating sacred sound as a benefit to my own spiritual unfolding.

Mantra japa, or repetition of God's name, is practiced in many religious traditions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Sufism, and many more. Buddhists, for example, may use mala beads—a strand of 108 like-sized beads—to count the repetitions. Catholics may use rosary beads to count the number of prayers repeated.

The Bible says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . ." The Hindu Vedas say, "The name of Brahman is OM, and OM is Brahman Himself." In yoga we use OM to describe the Supreme, the Divine, or God. All mantras are born out of OM, the Divine sound of the Universal Hum. When you chant OM you are experiencing all mantras, all vibrations in one sound. Since different people have different vibrations, preferences, and needs, there are an endless number of mantras for use in mantra japa. There are also different mantras for healing, for purification, and even for death.

By constantly repeating God's name we steady the mind and literally become filled with divine vibrations. It is said that during this time in the evolution of humanity, mantra japa is the easiest, quickest, and most effective way to achieve self-realization and spread peaceful vibrations to the world around us.

The mantra can be repeated aloud or silently, as in my mother's case, to lead into one-pointed concentration and then meditation. Silent, heartfelt repetition is considered the highest form of japa. In *To*

Know Yourself, Sri Swami Satchidananda says, "By repeating your mantra you spread the vibration through your system until it pervades your body and mind. Your entire personality vibrates on that beautiful wavelength and automatically attracts similar vibrations. You become in tune with others who have similar waves, and ultimately the cosmic wave." The mantra is the key to open one to higher states of spiritual experience, but it is in the steady, continuous effort of repetition that the real transformation occurs.

Often a spiritual aspirant has a guru from whom to request a mantra. When the seeker is ready, the guru will give a mantra appropriate for his or her capacity. One does not have to be initiated by a guru, however, to derive benefits from mantra repetition. There was a time several years ago when I really needed to pull myself out of the stuckness I was identifying with so strongly. I selected a mantra and began to repeat it with all earnestness. I used a strand of mala beads to count the repetitions as I sat for meditation; then I learned to count using my fingers in a coordinated system. I chanted the mantra while meditating, driving, cooking, cleaning, before sleeping—as often as I could remember. Every time my mind drifted to the unpleasant situation, I repeated the mantra. Soon it started to play continuously in my head. When I noticed this, I realized that I felt much better and much steadier. Gradually the emotional pain that I was feeling began to subside. I began to experiment with other mantras for other purposes.

One doesn't have to know the meaning of the mantra being used—the effect will be just as great, maybe even greater, without that knowledge. The

translation, even when available, can be a distraction until the mantra becomes firmly established. My teacher explained it this way: "If I tried to describe a certain flower to you, I could give a lot of details about the size, shape, and color of the flower. I might even be able to describe the aroma of it to some extent, but it would not be possible to put into words the intrinsic nature of it. The flower's subtle essence, its Divine form, can only be experienced when you are holding and looking at the flower yourself, using your own senses. Once you've experienced it, all of my words and descriptions fall away." Translations can also be a distraction since they can hold their own charge from past experiences; and sometimes there is no direct translation if you are using a Bija mantra, or "seed" sounds like Ram, Yam, or Hrim.

George Fuerstein says, in *The Shambala Guide to Yoga*,". . . recitation and chanting were early on cultivated (by humans) as potent means for focusing the mind, pacifying the senses, and elevating consciousness to a higher level of functioning, creating the proper conditions for a deep spiritual opening." This sounds great, but how does this physically work? My Western mind wants to know! In the magazine *Yoga International,* November, 2001, Bill Boos claims that "most neuroscientists would agree that when a meditator silently repeats a mantra, his or her prefrontal cortex, located near the forehead and responsible for focus and intent, becomes active." When parts of the cortex become almost hyperactive, other parts of the brain inhibit further cortical stimulation—leading to pratyahara, or withdrawal of the senses from the objects of the external world. Boos says that

"sensory shutdown is precipitated by intense concentration, not simply the low-grade filtering which happens when the mind is trained on a task."

Mantra japa is very simple, requiring only faithful practice to achieve the many benefits of deep meditation. Regardless of religious tradition, sacred sound can play an integral role in anyone's experience of the Divine. In giving oneself fully to this practice, one's heart will gradually open into inner stillness. I have found mantra invaluable on my spiritual journey and I offer thanks to my mother and all of my spiritual teachers who have guided me to this wonderful practice. Om Shanti, peace to all.

Here are some lovely mantras to work with:

Hari Om
Om Shanti
Om Namah Shivayah

Gayatri Mantra
Om Bhur Buvah Svaha
Tat Savitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi
Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat

Maha Mrytunjaya Mantra
Om Tryambakam Yajamahe
Sugandhim Pushtivarddhanam
Urva Rukamiva Bandhanan
Mrityor Mukshiya Mamritat

BOOK REVIEW

We offer you two brief reviews, provided by the publishers, of books by Brother Wayne Teasdale. The second is one he co-edited and for which he wrote an autobiographical essay.

The Mystic Hours: A Daybook of Interspiritual Wisdom & Devotion, by Wayne Teasdale
New World Library, 2004, 369 pages
www.newworldlibrary.com, 800-97-BOOKS

For author and interspiritual teacher Brother Wayne Teasdale, we are all mystics. Even though we may never discover it, we are created for a direct relationship with divine reality. Throughout his teachings, Teasdale emphasizes that books and reading can often serve as direct paths to mystical realizations. In his new book, *The Mystic Hours,* Teasdale provides a powerful 365-day book of spiritual wisdom, filled with quotes from all the great religious and spiritual traditions, from St. John of the Cross to Father Thomas Keating to Confucius to *The Dhammapada.* He has organized the book for repeated readings, to be consulted twice a day as an aid to meditation and reflection. Through 365 quotations, Teasdale provides not only a wonderful tool for spiritual awakening and deepening, but an amazing document that clarifies the true meaning of interspirituality: that at the core of all our religions and philosophies lies burning mystical wisdom that can bring us together sooner than tear us apart.

Awakening the Spirit, Inspiring the Soul: 30 Stories of Interspiritual Discovery in the Community of Faiths,
Co-edited by Wayne Teasdale and Martha Howard, MD;
foreword by Joan Borysenko, Ph.D.
SkyLight Paths, August 2004, 224 pages
www.skylightpaths.com, 800-962-4544

The only way to peace and progress in the difficulties facing countries and communities today is through religious tolerance and—as Wayne Teasdale tirelessly taught for more than two decades—the practice of interspirituality. With the publication of this new book, Teasdale has brought this daunting word and concept to the audience of the religiously involved and the spiritually curious, offering firsthand accounts of how people practice more than one faith today.

Awakening the Spirit, Inspiring the Soul shows how ordinary people from around the world and all walks of life practice interspirituality. Defined by Teasdale as an openness to other spiritual traditions and a willingness to explore them in more than a scholarly sense, interspirituality is fast becoming the norm for religious practice in the lives of millions of people today.

Amazon.com's editors called Teasdale "a man committed to building a global 'interspiritual' movement—where we [are] all monks in the world, collectively doing the right thing while honoring the many and diverse paths to God."

Thomas Berry calls this book "[a] superb presentation of how these great spiritual traditions are now meeting and supporting each other—how they all give witness to the transforming presence of the divine in human consciousness."

ENDPIECE

One Hundred Wows

Rabbi Marcia Prager

Jewish tradition teaches we should be able to say one hundred brakhot a day. Our lives should be so rich and varied, so filled with awareness that our souls will want to stretch one hundred times a day! How many of us experience, in our daily lives, a hundred "wows"? What a treat it could be to feel so alive to the world that each taste, each scent, each glimpse of the world's beauty would move us to exclaim the miracle of it all. Imagine a day filled with a hundred wonders.

Does this seem beyond reach? It needn't be. Each moment offers us more gifts than we imagine. We wake up and are alive; we have miraculous bodies; we are free; we have minds that learn and hearts that love. We can taste and feel.

Our lives are a banquet of sensations. Take a moment and remember: the tang of tangerine, the sensuous sweetness of milk chocolate, spicy cinnamon tea, cold watermelon on a hot summer day. We open our eyes and see the first flowering trees of spring and dandelion weeds affirming life in the cracks of asphalt. Hidden wonders lie even in the most mundane tasks of our lives . . . When we want to acknowledge the miracle of these moments, to remember them, to log them, we can do this with a brakha.

Rabbi Marcia Prager is a teacher, artist, storyteller, and therapist in the Jewish Renewal tradition and interfaith settings. She is rabbi for the Philadelphia and Princeton P'nai Or Communities. Visit her web site at www.rabbimarciaprager.com. Excerpted with author's permission from her book, The Path of Blessing *(Bell Tower 1998/Jewish Lights 2003).*

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